

Nerima Home Companion: Kouchou no Fukashuu

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Summary: Ranma in the style of Garrison Keillor: Ranma is turning forty, and doesn't like it one bit....

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The stage is dimly lit, and empty, and the audience awaits the featured

>speaker. He walks onstage, carrying a metre-high three-legged stool.

<br>He sets it down, center stage front, and as the spotlight falls upon

>him, we notice the dark circles under his eyes. He has aged twenty

<br>years or so since we recall him, but it is clearly Hikaru Gosunkugi.

>His days of dabbling with voodoo long behind him, he now holds forth

<br>weekly on this very stage, and his gravy-like voice (well, it's brown

>and lumpy, anyway, as he would say) is carried across Japan on NHK <br>public radio.

><br>The audience is silent as he begins his monologue:

><br>"It's been a quiet week in the Nerima district of Tokyo, my hometown...

><br>=====

><br>NERIMA HOME COMPANION:

>Kouchou no Fukashuu (The Principal's Revenge)<br>a Ranma 1/2 fanfiction by Ukyou Kuonji

><br>With apologies to Rumiko Takahashi and Garrison Keillor

><br>=====

><br>It's been a quiet week in the Nerima ward of Tokyo, my hometown. The

>palm tree in the middle of the Kuno family compound finally bore fruit <br>this past week, just in time for Ranma Saotome's fortieth birthday.

>I'm sure Principal Kuno would have found it most appropriate.<br>

>After all, it was he who planted that tree, right smack in the

middle of  
the Japanese garden. It looks ridiculously out of place there, standing  
>br>brazenly amidst freshly raked sand and a scattering of stones, like  
a  
man in an aloha shirt amongst a group of salarymen. And the huge root  
>sticking out in front of it doesn't help; at the very least, it makes  
>raking the sand in properly Zen formations that much more difficult for  
>poor Sasuke.<br>  
>But then, that was Kuno-kouchou, after all. Always making life  
>difficult for everyone else. That tree represents everything he was...  
>and is.<br>  
>Did I say he'd planted that tree? I should correct myself. That tree  
>planted him, to be accurate. Most of you probably remember that palm  
>tree the principal had growing out of his head. It certainly served to  
>rivet a class' attention whenever he was speaking:  
><br>"You know, Kimiko, I'm sure that thing didn't reach to the top of the  
>chalkboard at the \*beginning\* of the semester..."<br>  
>"Oh, you're imagining things, Akisa. It's always been that big."<br>

>After a couple of years, succeeding classes began to discover that Akisa  
>was quite right. Slowly at first, but faster and faster over time, the  
>tree on Kuno-kouchou's head was growing. After a while, the debate  
>shifted from whether it was growing to \*how\*. Most of the kids assumed  
>the tree was receiving its nourishment from the principal's brain. It  
>certainly would explain his (to put it mildly) erratic behavior. Others  
>insisted that no, if that was all the tree lived off of, it would starve  
>to death in short order.  
><br>Well, it was feeding off of him, that much was clear. Finally, though,  
>it had eaten away too much of whatever it was of Kunou-kouchou for him  
>to survive, and he pitched forward on his face one bright summer day in  
>the middle of the garden. By the time the medical profession was  
>summoned, the principal had been dead for days.

><br>Kunou-kouchou's death came as a terrific surprise to all concerned in  
>Nerima. Not that it happened, or even how it happened (though your  
>average Neriman, if asked before the event, would have assumed the man  
>would meet his end at the hands of the students he so loved... to  
>torture), but rather where it happened. For all the zeal he put into  
>punishing tardiness and truancy, he was best known for his own absentee  
>record, spending most of his time in Hawaii, evidently at school  
>expense. Some folks would have preferred he pass away over there -  
>at least the palm tree would be relatively inconspicuous in the middle  
>of the Pacific, and he could be quickly forgotten. Of course, it would  
>have gone against his grain to be inconspicuous anywhere, so perhaps it  
>all made sense.<br>

>Actually, the tree that killed him also helped Nerima forget about him. <br>The medics not only proved too late to resuscitate the principal, they  
>were too late to even move him onto a stretcher. The tree had already <br>taken root in the soil of the Kunou garden, and Kunou-kouchou could not  
>be moved, pinned as his head was to the ground by a web of roots.  
<br>Within a year, the tree's root system had swallowed him up entirely.  
>Now, the only person who gives even the most passing thought to him is <br>Sasuke, as he has to constantly rake around that ridiculous man-shaped  
>root only half submerged in the sandy soil.<br>>\*\*\*\*\*<br>>Ranma certainly doesn't give the old principal much thought, as he's  
<br>rather preoccupied with the fact that age is catching up with him, too.  
>Soun Tendo passed away at the age of nearly seventy without a wrinkle <br>and without a hair lost or greying. Ranma wishes he were so lucky.  
>Already his hair's gotten so thin that the only time he can wear his  
<br>trademark pigtail is in his girl form, which still looks every inch the  
>knockout she ever did... you must remember, it was Spring of Drowned  
<br>\*Young\* Girl that he fell into, after all. Which means that now, both  
>of his forms are challenges to his manhood.<br>>Yes, that's right... his hair is thinning. Is that such a surprise?  
<br>After all, his father was spear-bald barely into his thirties, and it  
>was inevitable that heredity would catch up with him. <br>>Oh, but there's the Dragon's Whisker, isn't there? Well, yes, but some  
<br>curses fade over time, and others gain strength. In this case, the one  
>gaining strength was the Saotome heredity (or would that be 'lack-of-<br>hair-edity?'), so there came a day when Ranma, noticing his hair's  
>condition, finally decided enough was enough. Curse or no curse, he  
<br>pulled the Whisker out of his pig-tail... actually, it had gotten so old  
>and brittle that when he tugged at it, it simply snapped in half.<br>>But nothing happened. His hair just sat there on his head, rather than  
<br>cascading out of it like a hirsute fountain. All that happened was  
>that a couple more hairs by his temples went white from the shock. It  
<br>was enough to send a man among men like Ranma to his knees. Folks don't  
>go in for irony much around here, or they would have pointed out that if  
<br>Ranma wasn't always trying to be so manly, this wouldn't bother him so  
>much. But he was, and it did, and that's that.<br>>To be honest, though, the Dragon's Whisker hadn't lost its effectiveness.<br>It just found itself thwarted by Ranma's genes, and spent the rest of  
>the day moving elsewhere. By nightfall Ranma's chest looked as if he'd  
<br>fallen into the Qiongniichuan - Spring of Drowned Gorilla. Well, at  
>least it looked manly... sort of.<br>>His son Akima thought his father's distress was pretty funny, and it

<br>did look odd for Ranma to have that thin pigtail - well, unbound, it  
>was more of a ponytail - attached to a head that was starting to  
<br>resemble that of a Franciscan friar. But you don't laugh at Ranma  
  
>Saotome, not even if you're his son. Akima's old man may indeed have  
<br>been getting old, but he was still Ranma Saotome. He whirled  
around  
>and grabbed his son by the collar: "Laugh all you wanna, kiddo," he  
<br>hissed, pointing at the bare circle on his head, "but you're  
looking  
>at the future, y'know."<br>  
>Now, I understand that male pattern baldness is passed down through  
the <br>mother's genes, and if that's true, Akima has nothing to  
worry about.  
>But Akima didn't know that. And late that night, he snuck into the  
<br>kitchen to make himself a midnight snack of ramen... and Dragon  
Whisker.  
><br>The next morning, the Saotomes awoke to a scream coming from  
Akima's  
>room. The girls were the first ones to investigate. They charged  
<br>into his room to find him sitting bolt upright in bed, hollering  
as  
>if he'd woken up from a nightmare.<br>  
>At which point the girls joined in the scream. Because while it was  
<br>supposed to have been Akima sitting in his bed, it sure didn't  
look  
>like him. What it did look like... was Cousin Itt. Akima was covered  
<br>in hair that poured straight down from the top of his head,  
pooled  
>around his buttocks where he was sitting on his bed, and ran in  
<br>rivulets off the bed onto the floor and beyond. Several locks  
were  
>lapping at the girls' feet by the time Ranma arrived.<br>  
>All Ranma could do when he walked in was sigh, partly out of  
irritation <br>at Akima's foolishness, part out of envy that the  
Whisker worked for  
>his son but not for him. Fortunately, Akima had only eaten one of  
the <br>broken halves, so Ranma headed off to the bathroom, looking  
for the  
>other half to tie his son's hair up with.<br>  
>"Akane... do we have a pair of shears?"<br>  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
>Faced as Ranma was with both physical and chronological reminders of  
<br>his own mortality, he was naturally in no mood to celebrate. Not  
that  
>it discouraged anyone else.<br>  
>Is it ever a good idea to throw someone a surprise party? Especially  
<br>when they hit such a milestone like the Big Four-Oh? It's that  
concrete  
>reminder that you are, statistically, past the half-way mark. No one  
<br>wants to be reminded of stuff like that.  
><br>But surprise parties are generally an act of vengeance; it's a  
giant  
>game of 'pass-it-along'. In this case, Nabiki was getting her own  
back. <br>A year ago, she was more or less abducted from her downtown  
office by  
>a bunch of guys in sunglasses and white suits - the whole yakuza  
look - <br>and brought to some undisclosed location (she thinks it  
had to have

>been in Nerima, otherwise there wouldn't have been so many old friends <br>there), where she was noisily feted on her own fortieth birthday. Even  
>her husband hadn't been told about it: Tarou had shown up with a  
<br>suitcase full of money after he got a call informing him of where she  
>was being "held." Everyone was congratulating him on bringing the most  
<br>appropriate present for his wife of anyone there.

><br>Before the event, there weren't a whole lot of people who both knew  
>when Nabiki's birthday was, and had the gall to pull off a stunt like  
<br>that. So Nabiki teamed up with Akane to nail Ranma... and you know  
>Akane's going to get it but good herself when she hits forty later this  
<br>year. (Meanwhile, Kasumi got off scot-free, partly because at forty-  
>three, she's untouchable for another seven years, and partly because  
<br>Nabiki \*still\* can't believe Kasumi has mob connections. She doesn't,  
>of course, but you don't have to be yakuza to own a white suit...)<br>  
>Ranma's celebration was held in more conventional and familiar  
<br>surroundings: the Tendo Dojo. The one catch was to try and get him  
>out of there. Martial arts being both vocation and avocation for  
<br>Ranma, it's quite rare that one doesn't see him there, aside from

>eating, sleeping, and battling the occasional monster threatening  
<br>either Akane or the kids or Tokyo, in that order.

><br>And that was just the excuse that was used...

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br>"Good afternoon, Ranma-kun... have you seen Sis around?" Ranma was

>caught in mid-leap by Nabiki, walking in casually. It's not easy to  
<br>walk casually into a room where a man is catapulting over your head as

>you do so, but Nabiki can pull it off. She's seen enough not to be  
<br>fazed by anything.

><br>Ranma landed on his feet barely a foot in front of his sister-in-law.

>For all of his ailuraphobia, Ranma behaves more like a cat than anyone  
<br>I know (barring Shampoo), even when not in neko-ken mode. But I'm not

>going to tell him that. "Akane? Thought she was in the family room  
<br>with the kids. She's not in the... kitchen, is she?"

><br>Nabiki sweatdropped and shook her head. "Uh-uh. Didn't see her

>anywhere, and I looked around. I wouldn't ask if I hadn't done my  
<br>homework."

><br>"Well, let's go through the place together. I might be able to find  
>her." <br>

>Nabiki gestured toward the door. "Lead on, bro'..."<br>  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>

>The girls had been reasonably well-coached (well, Nagisa had to be  
<br>bribed a bit) regarding their mother's absence. Akima didn't need

>coaching: engrossed as he was in a martial arts show on television,

<br>all he answered to his dad was "Huh?"  
><br>On their way upstairs, Nabiki fiddled a bit with her pager. Less than  
>a minute later, the phone in the master bedroom began ringing furiously.<br>  
>"Yeah, yeah, I've got it... Saotome."<br>  
>"Missing something, fem-boy?"<br>  
>Ranma growled. Brother-in-law Tarou may be, but that didn't mean he  
<br>had to like him. He shot Nabiki a look, which she instantly recognized  
>as his patented 'why-the-hellja-marry-this-jerk-anyway' look, and to  
<br>which she simply shrugged.  
><br>"What do you know about this... Pantyhose?"  
><br>"PantSUIT, fem-boy. I know everything. Take a listen..." and the  
  
>next sound Ranma heard was the muffled 'Mmph! Mmph!' of a woman with  
<br>a gag in her mouth.  
><br>"Akane! What's he \*done\* to you? Where's he \*taken\* you?"  
  
><br>The muffled sounds faded as Ranma cried out to his kidnapped wife, to  
>be replaced with a sneer. "That, as they say on the playgrounds, is  
<br>for me to know, and you to find out."  
><br>"Dammit, you won't get away with this, Tarou!"  
><br>"Oooh, I'm so scared. Old man karate's mad at me."  
><br>Nabiki watched as steam began to seep out of Ranma's ears. It wouldn't  
>do for her brother-in-law to have a heart attack before the festivities. <br>She tapped him on the shoulder. "Uh...  
Ranma-kun...?"  
><br>He spun around... "Nabiki! What about Nabiki?" he yelled into the phone.  
><br>There was a breif pause on the other end of the line. Hah...  
Pantyhose  
>Tarou caught off guard. "...Nabiki...?"<br>  
>"Yeah, Nabiki... your WIFE, remember? She's standing right here next  
<br>to me, squid. If she finds out you're kidnapping her little sister,  
>she's gonna sue you for divorce so fast... and you're gonna wish you  
<br>kept those pantyhose, Pantyhose, 'cause it'll be all you'd have to  
>cover yourself with once she gets through with you."<br>  
>Another pause. Ranma was sure he had Tarou by the short hairs.<br>  
  
>"Nabiki's standing... next to you?"<br>  
>"Yup... and she's heard the whole thing." Ranma was sounding as smug  
<br>as Tarou usually did.  
><br>A third pause, and then, a low growl. "Put... the bitch... on.  
NOW!"  
><br>So startled was Ranma that he promptly turned the phone over to Nabiki  
>without a second thought.<br>  
>Nabiki blinked. And took the phone. "Tarou... what do you think you're <br>\*doing\*?"  
><br>She could hear the grin in her husband's voice. "Getting my own back.  
>These two really made asses out of us last year, so I'm enjoying this." <br>There was a feminine gasp, and; "There you go. Sorry about that, but  
>we had to make it sound convincing."<br>

>"Yeah, right..." Akane's voice.<br>  
>Nabiki's expression didn't change. "What are you going to do to her?"<br>  
>"Heh. You should ask what I'm going to do to \*you\* once this is over<br>with..." And completely unconcerned with the fact that his sister-in-law was sitting only a few feet away, Tarou began to lauch into a<br>litany of marital acts that were, shall we say, unique to the Tarous.  
><br>You see, Pantsuit Tarou, unlike Ranma, had learned to embrace his curse rather than shun it. This applied to every aspect of his life, including <br>romance - if you could call it that. And once she got over the initial shock, Nabiki learned to embrace it, too... quite literally. After all, <br>here was a guy who was not only rich, but intelligent and arrogant as she was, and to top it all off, hung like a bull! She even discovered <br>she enjoyed tentacles now and again.  
><br>But Pantsuit was going a bit far with this list - and in front of her sister, no less! "Pantsuit, no... don't do this." <br>  
>Ranma watched as her sister-in-law turned crimson with rage and quavered <br>in fear. Finally, he could take no more; he snatched the phone from Nabiki's hands and without even bothering to bring the receiver to his <br>ear, screamed into the mouthpiece "I don't care where you are, panty-boy,  
>I am gonna hunt you down to the ends of the earth, and I am gonna put <br>you in a world of hurt!" SLAM. He charged out of the room, down the stairs, and out the gates, leaving Nabiki behind, still staring at the <br>phone.  
><br>At which point, she broke down laughing. Kami, but Ranma sounds so like a pro wrestler when he's like this. So cheesy. Maybe if he didn't <br>write his own lines...  
><br>And she headed for the Ono clinic to fetch her husband and sister.  
>She'd need help decorating the dojo, even though she knew Ranma <br>wouldn't return until \*he\* found them himself.  
><br>It was a good thing they \*were\* at the clinic, too. Pantsuit had barely set the phone down before he got clocked by red-faced Akane. "And I <br>used to think \*Ranma\* was a pervert."  
><br>\*\*\*\*\*  
><br>Many hands make light work, they say - although folks watching Tarou working in his cursed form might disagree (including him) -<br>and with Kasumi in the kitchen and the others festooning the dojo with black crepe, preparations were made swiftly.<br>  
>And none too soon, as the hordes were about to storm the gates.<br>  
>"Hello there, Yuka, Takeshi..."<br>  
>"Hi there, Kasumi... place looks nice."<br>  
>"Why, thank you."<br>  
>"Oh hey, Tarou... Ranma was looking for you. He seemed pissed."<br>  
>"I know. We had to get him out of the dojo SOMEhow..."<br>

>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
>Knock-knock.<br>  
>"Nihao! Shampoo need hide for surprise Ranma?"<br>  
>"Yeah, but stay human for this one, okay?"<br>  
>"Of course. Bull-man know that Ranma look for...?"<br>  
>"Yes, yes..."<br>  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
>"Ah... come on in, Hiroshi-kun."<br>  
>"Thanks, Kasumi. Oh, hey, Tarou, Ra-"<br>  
>"I \*KNOW\*!!"<br>  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
>Finally, everyone was in the dojo and in their places. Everyone,  
<br>that is, except the guest of honor.  
><br>"Well, honey... guess it's time to bring him in." Splash.

><br>In his cursed form, all Tarou could do was let out a questioning  
"Mrr?"  
><br>Nabiki smiled. "Oh, come on... you \*know\* he's expecting you to  
  
>face him like this. Besides, you're easier to find this way, too."  
<br>She put her finger to her lips as if trying to remember  
something.  
>"Oh, and Akane..."<br>  
>"Hmm?"<br>  
>"You'll need to be tied up." She gestured to several of the other  
<br>guests to get some ropes from the supply cabinet, which several  
  
>of the still-single guys were all too eager to do.<br>  
>"Tied up? Again? Are you out of your mind?" A bluish glow began  
<br>to form around Akane.  
><br>"You're supposed to have been kidnapped, Akane... come on,  
  
>you know the drill." Nabiki's eyes glinted mischeivously as her  
<br>sister's battle aura vanished. It was all part of the plan, after  
all,  
>and Akane had agreed to it right from the start. "And admit it...  
<br>you love it, Sis."  
><br>"I am noff yoof, Nafiffi."  
><br>"Nice gag, boys." It didn't take long, once Akane stopped  
struggling,  
>and Nabiki began to understand just how satisfying this had been  
<br>for her husband. She was already well on her way to getting even  
  
>for last year's humiliation.<br>  
>Now, to get Ranma.<br>  
>"Time to take off, sweetie." Nabiki slapped her monstrous spouse  
<br>on the flank, who lumbered over to Akane and slung her over his  
  
>massive shoulder. "Try not to let him kick your butt \*too\*  
hard..."<br>  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
>Pantsuit Tarou was doing a bovine impression of a growl as he left  
<br>the dojo. How dare that woman suggest Ranma could kick his butt!

><br>But it was true. After all, while Tarou had made his fortune in  
the  
>Nikkei, Ranma had continued to practice the Art. They were not  
<br>evenly matched, and Tarou knew it. He would never admit it,



>even to himself, but he knew it. And he had no intention of  
<br>letting his butt get kicked.  
><br>All he had to do was to find fem-boy, and lead him on a merry  
  
>chase back to the dojo.<br>  
>Assuming he could find him, that was.<br>  
>\*\*\*\*\*<br>  
>Nerima ward has been home to many a strange sight, many <br>of which  
centered around Ranma Saotome. But these days,  
>sometimes the strangest sight is Ranma himself. I'm sure most <br>of  
you still picture him as that muscled teenage cartoon character,  
  
>a martial-arts superhero, albeit with plenty of faults. But the  
thing <br>is, cartoon characters and superheroes never age. Oh, Ranma  
still  
>has the muscles, and he still bounds ten metres in the air as he  
<br>travels from rooftop to rooftop, but he's no teenager anymore.  
  
>The rippling chest has been augmented by a pot belly -  
nothing<br>like his father's, mind you, but you can't miss it - and  
what little  
>hair he has is getting quite gray. He's very self-conscious about  
<br>it, and it's why he keeps trying to act as much like he used to  
  
>when he was still in his prime. He succeeds at this better than  
<br>most, but there's something about that sight that even Nerima  
  
>has trouble adjusting to from time to time.<br>  
>It was a sight Pantsuit Tarou wasn't prepared for, either. If Nerima  
<br>finds a sight strange, how much more so an occasional visitor (of  
  
>course, Pantsuit himself is one of those strange sights Nerima used  
<br>to be familiar with). Old Man Karate, indeed. He laughed so hard  
  
>that he was forced to land, lest he drop Akane.<br>  
>Which brings us to another thing about Nerima, and what people are  
<br>used: things break around there rather easily. It didn't use to  
be  
>because everything was cheaply made, either. Buildings and walls  
<br>and everything else used to be as sturdy here as anywhere else.  
  
>But after twenty-plus years of dealing with martial artists that  
could <br>wreck adamantite with a flick of the wrist, folks in Nerima  
started  
>to give up. Why waste time and expense making something  
sturdy,<br>when it'll soon get broken as surely as if it were made of  
balsa wood?  
>Cheap and quick, that's the Nerima construction philosophy these  
<br>days.  
><br>The reason I'm explaining this is because this posed a problem  
for  
>Pantsuit when he landed. You see, when he came down, he landed  
<br>on a roof.  
><br>Naturally, it gave way under his massive weight.  
  
><br>Naturally, it was the roof over the local sentou.  
><br>And naturally, he landed in hot water. In several senses of the  
term.  
>Bad enough he was no longer in his cursed form. Bad enough Akane  
<br>had landed on top of him, pinning him underwater, for the moment.

>Bad enough that Ranma had spotted him aloft and would be there  
<br>any second to pound him into dust.  
><br>But why in Kami's name did he have to land on the women's side?

>And what with the transformation, he was every bit as naked as  
<br>they were.

><br>Oh, crap...

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br>Having seen Pantyhose drop into the sentou, and realizing from  
the

>screams exactly \*which\* side of the bathhouse he'd landed on, Ranma  
<br>kept his distance. All he could do was to stand by the hole in  
the roof

>(looking away from it, of course) and holler, "Akane! Are you down  
<br>there? Are you alright?"

><br>"Yes, I'm fine!" By this time, Akane had been carried to safety  
and

>untied by several of the bathers who weren't making beef hash out of  
<br>Tarou. "I'll meet you outside, and we can head home, okay?"

><br>"Right! I'll be by the door!" Heroics were not called for under  
the

>circumstances, and at his age, Ranma had learned when to simply  
<br>wait for Akane to bail herself out. He knew the trouble he could  
get

>into on the wrong side of a bathhouse; whatever he could mete out to  
<br>Pantyhose, the girls would give to him and then some. Besides,

>Akane could take care of herself; she had made that abundantly  
<br>clear over the years.

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br>"Oh, it was awful, Ranma! Having to be tied up like that... and

>Pantyhose was saying the most horrible things! Those things he  
<br>was threatening to do..." Akane shuddered as she walking  
alongside

>Ranma back to the dojo. It wasn't simply part of the act, either -  
<br>she had no taste for the exotic, um, amusements that her sister  
ran

>to. She knew that Tarou wouldn't have done anything to her, but the  
<br>thought of him and Nabiki... well, it sent chills up and down her  
spine.

><br>Ranma put his arm around her shoulder. "Well, what matters is  
that

>you're safe. I figure those girls'll give him plenty of the  
punishment <br>he deserves." He chuckled softly. "Of course, he may  
be into that

>sort of thing..."<br>

>It didn't earn him a malleting, but Akane did give him a sharp shove  
<br>in the ribs. "Don't make me \*think\* about stuff like that,  
Ranma!"

><br>"All right, already! Sheesh..."

><br>They were almost to the dojo when they saw him. Bruised and  
ragged,

>draped only in a towel, which he'd presumably stolen from the  
sentou. <br>Heading for the dojo - and from all appearances, he'd get  
there ahead

>of them.<br>

>"Pantyhose... what the hell's he doing, heading for \*our\* house?"

<br>Ranma broke into a run, and Tarou, with a glance over his shoulder,  
>charged into the courtyard of the Tendo compound. "How dare you?"  
<br>Dammit, Pantyhose, when I get my hands on you..."

><br>"SURPRISE!!"

><br>Ranma's voice quickly dropped to a low murmur amid the cheering and

>the noisemakers, but otherwise, he didn't miss a beat. "...I am going <br>to kill you."

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br>This really wasn't a party for the children, but Akane had decided

>against sending them off to Grandma Saotome's, or else her husband  
<br>might suspect something. After all these years, now Akane's giving

>Ranma \*more\* credit than he deserved when it comes to being  
<br>observant. So they were there, too. Akima had to be pulled away

>from the buffet table more than once, lest he leave the guests hungry.<br>And as Ranma was unwrapping his gifts, well...

><br>"Daddy, they live on a farm... couldn't they have sent a \*real\* horse?"

>Noriko's one of those girls who asks for a pony with every birthday  
<br>and Christmas, and she has the added insult of having a father who

>receives horse-motif gifts on a regular basis, thanks to his name.  
<br>It's just another reminder of something she can't have.

><br>Akane did her best to placate her younger daughter. "Honey, you

>know that's because of Daddy's name. Besides, the Hibikis live on  
<br>a pig farm... you wouldn't want them to send us a live pig, now,

>would you?"<br>

>"Sure... I could wrestle it." Akima piped up. After meeting Yoiko,  
<br>and hearing about how her parents met, he had gotten it into his

>head that that would be the way to win her affection. She certainly  
<br>seemed like she wanted to spend time with him here in Tokyo,

>showing her around and what-have-you. It was the sort of thing  
<br>that was beginning to sound quite pleasant, indeed.

><br>For the first time that evening, Ranma grinned at his boy's eagerness.

>"Well, I'd bet Pops would think that would be good training, but I don't  
<br>think we could keep a pig here, son. Maybe we can visit the Unryuu

>farm sometime."<br>

>"You mean it? Really?"<br>

>"Sure, why not? It's something I never got a chance to do."<br>

>Akane tapped her husband on the shoulder, "And a good thing for you,  
<br>too... didn't you have enough girls chasing you without having Akari

>to deal with?" It was just about enough to cause Ranma to color a bit.<br>

>Meanwhile, Noriko sensed that she was being ignored. "But Mommm...

<br>Daddy gets all this stupid horse stuff, and I'm always asking for

one..."

><br>"(Yes, you are...) Noriko, honey... remember, Daddy's name means

>\*wild\* horse.' You wouldn't really want a wild horse, now, would you?"<br>

>"I could tame it."<br>

>Akane heaved a deep sigh. "That's what \*I've\* been trying to do for  
<br>the past twenty years..."

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br>Everyone at the affair had already presented Ranma with something,

>be it something he might want or need, or the occasional gag gift (Hiroshi, <br>for one, had brought a bottle of Viagra from the local pharmacy he ran,

>thus covering both gag and useful in one fell swoop), when Daisuke  
<br>stepped outside for a little fresh air - even at this advanced age, guys

>still drink way too much sake, just to show that they still can - and <br>nearly tripped over an box that had been left by the entrance.

>Forgetting his queasiness, he ran inside with it. <br>

>"Oi, gang... found this outside. There's no card or anything.

Anybody <br>\*not\* give Ranma their present?"

><br>Stone silence, as everyone shook their heads. Then a rumble of

>footsteps, as everyone crowded around Daisuke to take a look at  
<br>this mystery gift. All at once, Daisuke remembered he was in

>desperate need of air. As soon as the box was in someone else's  
<br>hands, he dropped to his knees in an effort to crawl out from the

>crowd.<br>

>He almost made it to the patio. Well, at least at that point, everyone <br>was more than willing to give him as much space as he needed.

><br>\*\*\*\*\*

><br>Aside from Daisuke, who was lying on the edge of the patio like a

>seasick man in a hurricane, and Kasumi, who was busily cleaning up  
<br>the effects of his, erm, seasickness, everyone was staring at the

>unidentified gift, and at Ranma as he picked it up and turned it  
<br>around several times in his hands. Nobody could figure out who it

>had come from. Everybody that the Saotomes knew well was <br>at the party except...

><br>"Hm... from the look of it, you'd think it might have come from one

>of the Kunous?"<br>

>Which seemed a bit odd, as the Kunous never have any dealings  
<br>with the Saotomes, and needless to say neither of them were at the

>party. Kodachi pretty much dropped her claim on Ranma-sama when  
<br>Akane became pregnant with Nagisa; it was clear to even her at that

>point that Ranma-sama and Akane were... were... she couldn't even  
<br>bear the thought of him having sex with someone other than herself,

>but the proof was incontrovertible. The only way Kodachi would ever  
<br>be able to have Ranma-sama would be as a mistress, and to lower

>herself to such second-class status was the last thing she would  
<br>consider doing. Which was fine, as she was the last person Ranma  
>would ever consider for a mistress, assuming he ever would.<br>

>Tatewaki, for his part, had also been avoiding the Saotomes for a  
<br>number of years, even the pig-tailed girl. Especially the  
pig-tailed girl,  
>in fact. As the years went by, even he could notice that his darling  
<br>still appeared to be about fifteen or sixteen years of age, and  
what  
>with Kodachi's constant ravings about her being a witch, he was  
<br>beginning to consider the unthinkable possibility that his sister  
might  
>be right. He wasn't sure which part of the proposition was scarier,  
<br>but he wasn't taking any chances.  
><br>But while it didn't seem as though it could have been from  
either  
>of them, it was clear that there was this one last present from...  
<br>someone. "Might as well open it... it's too light to be a bomb,

>anyway..." <br>  
>Thus assured, everyone crowded around him to see what was <br>in  
this mystery box. The Hawaiian-motif kerchief was untied to

>reveal a black lacquer box, inside of which was a coconut.<br>  
>An almond-white coconut. <br>  
>There wasn't a whisker of that brown hair on it. It was  
<br>Kunou-kouchou's gift to Ranma, a little reminder that,  
>after all these years, Ranma Saotome had finally gotten <br>that  
buzz cut the principal tried and failed to give him.  
><br>Spirit wards were immediately slapped onto the coconut's white

>skin, and Ranma hurled the thing into low earth orbit. But some  
<br>of the partygoers could swear they heard the faint sound of the

>principal's booming laughter, even as they watched it disappear  
<br>off into the horizon...

><br>  
>And that's the News from Nerima...<br>where all the women are strong  
(and how!)...  
>all the men are... well, they aren't always men, actually...<br>and  
all the craziness is above average.

><br>=====

><br>Ara...

><br>This story was taking shape so nicely, I thought I could have

>it out about a week after the pilot NHC episode was released.  
<br>Needless to say, other stuff intervened. The story itself

>started to unfold quite a bit (which is a good thing when you're  
<br>trying to ramble, but the writing takes longer), and then there

>was that weird Utena bit (you're right Zen... I really need to  
<br>lay off the midnight okonomi-yaki).

><br>I'm concerned, too, that I'm starting to lose the folksy  
monologue

>style of Keillor's original work... anyone familiar with it and  
willing<br>to check this against it?

><br>And there's so many more ideas, but never the time to commit  
>them to paper (or disk, or, well... you know what I mean, sugar).  
<br>Heh... sometimes I wish I could palm them off on someone else.

><br>Anyway, I'm hoping that shortly I'll be set up for IIRC as well  
as  
>the MUCK... on the other hand, Kami only knows \*when\* I'll be  
<br>able to go on. Could have a time for y'all once the school year

>starts for Dan-chan, but 'til then...<br>  
>Of course, any comments, criticism, flames, what-have-you <br>can  
still be sent to me at:  
><br>ukyoukwnji@aol.com  
><br>Until next time, ja!  
><br>Itsu mo,  
><br>Ucchan ^\_^

End  
file.